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ABSTRACT

Participants in the Conference on Continuing Vocational Training (CVT) represented 13 countries from Central and Eastern Europe, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Uzbekistan, European Union (EU) countries, European Commission, and European Training Foundation. The conference aimed to increase awareness among policymakers and social partners on CVT's key role during the transition from school to work and beyond. A cross-country analysis based on national reports on the present state of CVT confirmed the low priority given to CVT and identified common issues. The conference was identified as the beginning of the Foundation's more intensive involvement in CVT development in partner countries. Panel discussion participants found a lack of understanding of CVT's potential role for mastering the transition and preparing for EU integration. Presentations focused on experiences in CVT for EU Member States (Jeff Kinzele, Ettore Marchetti); European Social Fund (Esteban Lozano Dominguez); and each country's need to develop its own CVT model (Hans Koch). Working groups focused on the state's and social partners' role, CVT and competitiveness, enhanced employability, social exclusion prevention, and finance. Conclusions were as follows: CVT has an important role in Central and Eastern European countries for underpinning and stimulating the transformation process and preventing social exclusion and for introducing systemic reforms in the education and training systems to cope with ongoing changes in employment and growing labor market uncertainty; and CVT cannot be left to short-term interventions. (YLB)

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Skills Needs Analysis

ED 431 112

Conference on Continuing Vocational Training

Turin 9-10 November 1998

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Main conclusions

1. Continuing Vocational Training (CVT) has an important role to play in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe for (i) underpinning and stimulating the transformation process and preventing social exclusion and for (ii) introducing systemic reforms in the education and training systems in order to be able to cope with ongoing changes in employment and growing labour market uncertainty.

2. CVT is of crucial importance for the countries as a whole, for companies and for individual citizens and particularly in the perspective of accession to the EU. Given this importance, the Conference was of the view that the development of CVT should receive much more attention than thus far, both from national policy makers and from the international donor community.

3. CVT cannot be left only to short-term interventions from the side of the national Employment Services nor to the operation of market forces. The State and the social partners should work out a joint strategy that should also include an agreement about their respective roles and contributions. Under the present conditions the State should take the initiative to launch a debate on such a strategy.

4. In developing and implementing modern concepts of CVT it will be essential (i) to radically improve the information basis concerning CVT and (ii) to have a continuous exchange of experience with EU Member States and other partner countries. The Foundation and the National Observatories could play an important role in facilitating both of those.

Background and aims.

1. Some 80 experts took part in a Conference on Continuing Vocational Training, organised by the European Training Foundation from 9-10 November in Turin. 13 countries from Central and Eastern Europe were present with delegations consisting of high level representatives from the Ministries of Education, Ministries of Labour, the social partners organisations and the research community. Delegations from Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Uzbekistan participated also in the conference together with a small group of experts from EU countries and representatives of the Commission and the Foundation.

2. The main aim of the Conference was to increase the awareness among policy makers and social partners from the partner countries on the key role that CVT could play during the transition process and beyond. The Conference should stimulate national policy makers to initiate the development of a CVT strategy, clarify which issues should be included in such a strategy and in which way the Foundation could further contribute to the development of CVT in the partner countries.

Presentations and discussions

1. In preparation for the Conference National Observatories in each participating country produced reports on the present state of CVT in their respective countries. The national reports also identified the challenges for developing CVT and potential areas of support from the side of the Foundation. Based on these, a first cross country analysis

was drawn up by an external expert. All national reports were available for the participants. The cross country report confirmed the low priority that has been given so far to CVT and singled out a series of common issues for further discussion during the Conference. The Conference was organised in such a way as to give the partner countries the opportunity to actively discuss and reflect on their own experiences against the background of international developments.

2. The conference was opened by *Mr Ulrich Hillenkamp*, Deputy Director of the European Training Foundation, who underlined that the conference was to be seen as the beginning of a more intensive involvement of the Foundation in the development of CVT in the partner countries. The agenda for the discussions was set by *Mr Peter Grootings*, the author of the cross-country analysis. In a panel discussion, participants confirmed the analysis and conclusions from the comparative report. They agreed that generally there is a lack of understanding of the potential role of CVT for mastering the transition and preparing for EU integration. They also agreed that the time has come to initiate a more strategic and comprehensive debate and to mobilise forces for the development of CVT. Such a debate would have to place CVT in the wider perspective of Lifelong Learning.

3. This was followed by two presentations on the experiences in CVT for EU Member States, based on the results of two studies undertaken by the European Commission. *Mr Jeff Kinzele* (from Luxembourg) presented the findings of the EU FORCE report on "Access, Quality and Volume of Continuing Vocational Training in Europe". *Mr. Ettore Marchetti* (DGXXII) reported on the outcomes of the first EU survey on CVT among 50.000 enterprises (CVTS1) and announced the expectation of the Commission to be able to include partner countries in the second survey for which preparations have now started (CVTS2). A presentation on the European Social Fund by *Mr Esteban Lozano Dominguez* (DGV) illustrated to the participants the kind of CVT interventions that EU member states are undertaking to promote social and economic development.

4. *Mr Hans Koch*, Head of the Analysis and Development Department of the Foundation, stressed that partner countries should be aware of the fact that there are no universal models for CVT. He mentioned that each country has to develop its own concept and strategy but in doing so, experiences from other countries can be taken into account. Agreement on a national strategy is a necessary condition for access to EU funding instruments such as the Social Fund type of action from year 2000 onwards. Mr Koch also pointed to the unique opportunity that the second EU survey on CVT would give to collect basic information and to enter in an exchange of experience in the important area of CVT in and for enterprises. He strongly recommended that the partner countries consider participation in this study.

5. Following these plenary introductions, the participants went into two rounds of working groups, each followed by a plenary reporting of the results. The first round of working groups was devoted to the following topics: (i) The Role of the State and the Social partners, (ii) CVT and Competitiveness, (iii) CVT to enhance Employability and prevent Social Exclusion, and (iv) Financing of CVT. The second round of working groups was devoted to providing national delegations with an opportunity to jointly assess the present situation in their own countries against the background of previous discussions, to agree on priorities for improvement and to come up with some suggestions as to how ETF could provide assistance.

Results of the discussions in the Working Groups

1. The discussions in the thematic Working Groups covered a wide range of issues. From the reports of the Groups some common issues became more clear:

2. While it is understood that social partners, companies and individuals all have their own responsibilities, under the present situation it is probably still the state that has to take the lead in the development of a more comprehensive, coherent and future oriented strategy. A decentralisation of the CVT market can only function within a national framework of qualifications and standards.

3. While the State will have to create equality of access for all, individual companies and citizens are likely to be involved in CVT only if they recognise the usefulness of doing so. This is related to guidance, quality and recognition. CVT has to respond to individual needs and its results must have a value on the education and labour market. Assessment of prior learning will become essential.

4. The enterprise structure has become much more diversified and segmented. Especially SMEs, who are constantly growing in numbers, have little opportunity to engage in traditional course-based forms of CVT, neither for their management nor for their workers. Alternative informal and work-based forms of CVT have to be developed to bring it closer to these companies. A better use of information and communication technologies should be promoted.

5. Most CVT activities are short-term and short-lived. This is related to funding mechanisms that are presently in place. The challenge will be to develop a more stable and comprehensive funding system. This is likely to be based on contributions from all involved. Realistic and sustainable funding mechanisms have to be discussed as part of the overall debate on CVT strategies. This funding mechanism will also be required for countries to have access in the future to complementary funding from the EU's structural funds.

6. The discussions in the Country Working Groups proved to be extremely useful. While for some delegations it was an unique opportunity to sit around one table and to exchange opinions, some delegations managed to agreeing as far as a clear agenda of actions. In general, most of the issues of the previous discussions were reviewed again from a national point of view. A potential Staff Development Programme was seen as very useful for the preparation of national key actors to the definition of national concepts in CVT. As *Mr Ulrich Hillenkamp*, who chaired the final session, remarked, the reports of the country groups showed a considerable awareness of the potential role of CVT and that a reflection has started about the issues that are at stake. This also showed that the conference had been successful. He expressed the hope and the expectation that participants would continue this discussion among themselves in their countries and that they would be instrumental in developing a national concept and strategy for CVT.

ETF and the future of CVT in partner countries

1. With regard to the possible role of the Foundation in the near future, Mr Hillenkamp, confirmed that the Foundation is prepared to support both the discussions at national level and a continued exchange of experience at the international level. The Foundation will as well have a critical look at its own Work Programme for the coming years to see how it can be best adapted to take into account the results of this Conference.